

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

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FM AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9538
INFO AMCONSUL BELIZE
AMEMBASSY MANAGUA
AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE
AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR
AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA
USCINCSO QUARRY HTS CZ

C O N F I D E N T I A L GUATEMALA 1559

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, GT, BH, SHUM
SUBJ: THE LUCAS VICTORY: IMPLICATIONS

REF: GUATEMALA 1476

1. THE FOLLOWING OBSERVATIONS UPDATE AND EXPAND OUR ORIGINAL EVAL-
UATION OF THE GUATEMALAN ELECTIONS (REFTEL) WHICH WAS MADE BEFORE
THE GUATEMALAN CONGRESS CONFIRMED GENERAL LUCAS AS THE NEXT
PRESIDENT.
2. THE PERFUNCTORY CONGRESSIONAL REVIEW OF THE DISPUTED ELECTION
TALLIES DID LITTLE TO RESTORE CONFIDENCE IN THE ELECTORAL SYSTEM
OR THE VALIDITY OF LUCAS' ULTIMATELY COMFORTABLE (58,000 VOTES)
VICTORY MARGIN. IT DID MAKE IT EASIER, HOWEVER, FOR THE INDEP-
ENDENT CONGRESSMEN TO SUPPORT LUCAS EN MASSE AND THUS PROVIDE HIM
THE NEEDED MAJORITY IN THE RUN-OFF.
3. THE QUESTION OF HOW MUCH FRAUD THERE WAS AND WHETHER IT
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AFFECTED THE FINAL ORDER IN WHICH THE CANDIDATES FINISHED REMAINS
UNRESOLVED AND WE PLAN TO EXAMINE IT IN DETAIL IN A SEPARATE
MESSAGE. WE HAVE, HOWEVER, SEEN FEW COMPLAINTS OF INTERFERENCE
WITH FREEDOM OF SUFFRAGE. MEANWHILE, THE EMBASSY'S IMPRESSION
IS THAT THERE WAS SOME FRAUD ON ALL SIDES. THE LITTLE TRUST-
WORTHY INFORMATION AT HAND DOES NOT PERMIT US TO GAUGE, AT LEAST
FOR THE PRESENT, WHETHER LUCAS WOULD HAVE WON A PLURALITY IN

UNTAINTED ELECTIONS; BUT THE FACT THAT EVEN THE MLN'S TALLIES CONCEDED LUCAS ALMOST AS MANY VOTES IN GUATEMALA CITY AS THEIR CANDIDATE LENDS SUPPORT TO THE IMPRESSION THAT LUCAS RAN STRONGLY. A FURTHER ARGUMENT SUPPORTING THE LEGITIMACY OF LUCAS' TRIUMPH WAS PERALTA MENDEZ' PUBLIC ADMISSION THAT ABSTENTIONS COST HIM DEARLY. FINALLY, THERE WAS GENERAL EXPECTATION THAT LUCAS WOULD HAVE WON IN THE CONGRESS WHETHER HE HAD PLACED FIRST OR SECOND IN THE POPULAR VOTE.

4. WE HAVE SEEN NOTHING TO CHANGE OUR OPINION THAT LAUGERUD AND THE MILITARY HIGH COMMAND, THEIR COMMITMENT TO LUCAS NOTWITHSTANDING, DID NOT INTERVENE IN THE ELECTORAL PROCESS. IRONICALLY, IT IS THE IMAGE OF CIVILIAN POLITICIANS WHICH SEEMS TO HAVE SUFFERED MOST.

5. LUCAS' VICTORY WILL BE ACCEPTED BY THE GUATEMALAN PUBLIC WHICH, ONE WAY OR ANOTHER, WOULD HAVE BEEN SURPRISED AT A DIFFERENT RESULT. THE POST-ELECTION UPROAR IS WINDING DOWN; NO MAJOR DISRUPTION OF THE LAUGERUD ADMINISTRATION'S REMAINING THREE AND A HALF MONTHS IN OFFICE SEEMS INDICATED. WE SEE NO WAIVERING OF MILITARY SUPPORT FOR LUCAS, BUT IT REMAINS TO BE SEEN WHETHER THE NEW GOVERNMENT WILL ENJOY THE STABILITY OF THE OLD. A FRESH ERUPTION OF RIGHT-WING VIOLENCE (SPURRED BY AN IRATE AND POSSIBLY VINDICTIVE MLN), ADDED TO SIGNS OF INCREASING EGP CAPABILITY, HOWEVER, COULD COMPLICATE LIFE FOR LUCAS AND QUICKLY PUT TO THE TEST HIS EXPRESSED COMMITMENT TO HUMAN RIGHTS AND DUE PROCESS.
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6. THE SCENE IS FAST SHIFTING TO THE QUESTION OF THE COMPOSITION OF THE NEXT CONGRESS. THE CONGRESSIONAL ELECTION RETURNS HAVE YET TO BE OFFICIALLY RELEASED. DESPITE ITS SKEW IN FAVOR OF THE WINNING PARTY IN A GIVEN DISTRICT, GUATEMALA'S SYSTEM OF PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION MAY DEPRIVE LUCAS OF A CONGRESSIONAL MAJORITY UNLESS HE GETS EXTENSIVE SUPPORT FROM THE CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS OR THE MLN. IF THE CONGRESSIONAL VOTES ARE DISTRIBUTED IN THE SAME WAY AS THE PRESIDENTIAL VOTES, WE SEE LITTLE WAY THE LUCAS COALITION CAN GET THE NEEDED 31 DEPUTIES. TO THE EXTENT THE LUCAS FORCES CANNOT ENGINEER A MAJORITY, THE CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS AND THE MLN WILL HAVE SOME LEVERAGE AND NEGOTIATING POWER. BY NOT FOLLOWING PERALTA MENDEZ' LEAD AND SUPPORTING PERALTA AZURDIA, THE DCG HAS ALREADY HINTED IT COULD BE AMENABLE TO ACCOMMODATION.

7. THE BITTER AFTERTASTE OF THE ELECTION SPECTACLE WOULD MAKE IT MUCH MORE DIFFICULT FOR THE LAUGERUD ADMINISTRATION TO MUSTER A CONSENSUS FOR A BELIZE SETTLEMENT. THAT, PLUS THE RESISTANCE IN BELIZE TO A TERRITORIAL COMPROMISE, VIRTUALLY ASSURES THAT THE WELL-MEANING LAUGERUD WILL BEQUEATH THE BELIZE ISSUE TO HIS SUCCESSOR IN THE TIME-HONORED TRADITION OF LESSER GUATEMALAN STATESMEN.

8. IF LUCAS MAKES GOOD ON HIS POST-ELECTION PROMISE TO PERMIT THE INSCRIPTION OF THE MANY POLITICAL PARTIES-IN-WAITING (APPARENTLY PART OF A BARGAIN WITH THE FUR, WHOSE ABSENTION CAMPAIGN SPLIT THE LEFT AND WHICH MAY WELL HAVE BEEN THE INSTRUMENT FOR IRREGULARITIES IN THE GUATEMALA CITY VOTE), THIS WOULD REPRESENT A SIGNIFICANT ADVANCE IN THE AREA OF POLITICAL RIGHTS. OVER THE LONG RUN, IT COULD HAVE NEGATIVE IMPLICATIONS FOR GUATEMALAN STABILITY.

9. IMPLICATIONS FOR THE US: WHILE FORECASTING IN THIS AREAS IS PREMATURE, WE HAVE THE IMPRESSION THAT DEALING WITH LUCAS (WHOSE REPUTATION IS THAT OF A RATHER PAROCHIAL NATIONALIST) AND VILLAGRAN KRAMER (A WILY MANIPULATOR WHO GIVES PROMISE OF AN

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ACTIVE AND INFLUENTIAL VICE PRESIDENCY) WILL BE LESS CONGENIAL AND STRAIGHTFORWARD THAN WITH THE OUTGOING ADMINISTRATION. VILLAGRAN'S EXPRESSED (IN PRIVATE) INTEREST IN MOVING TOWARD SOME NORMALIZATION OF RELATIONS WITH CUBA AND OTHER COMMUNIST COUNTRIES RAISES QUESTIONS FOR US INTERESTS AS WELL AS SPECULATION ABOUT THE DOMESTIC IMPACT SUCH DEPARTURES FROM GUATEMALAN TRADITION WOULD HAVE. WE CONTINUE TO BELIEVE, HOWEVER, THAT VITAL US INTERESTS ARE LARGELY UNAFFECTED BY THE ELECTION RESULT.

10. CAMPAIGN RHETORIC AND OUR CONVERSATIONS WITH LUCAS SUPPORTERS GIVE LITTLE CLUE ABOUT WHAT TO EXPECT FROM A LUCAS GOVERNMENT BY WAY OF POLICY INNOVATIONS, OTHER THAN THOSE MENTIONED. WE SEE NO CAUSE TO ALTER OUR GENERAL PREMISE THAT WHILE THE LUCAS GOVERNMENT WILL TRY TO PUT ITS OWN STAMP ON GUATEMALAN LIFE, POWER DYNAMICS (E.G., MILITARY AND PRIVATE SECTOR INFLUENCE) WILL OPERATE AGAINST DRAMATIC CHANGES.

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